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by the King's permission, to visit his patient until he shall return to the court.

The protection of the Groom of the Rein to the Queen is similar to that of the Groom of the Rein to the King.

[*To be continued.*]

BARDIC PORTRAITS.

MERDDIN.

OF all the names, connected with the early literature of Wales, there is none more remarkable than that of Merddin, whether it be with reference to his legitimate fame, or to those præternatural endowments, which the popular voice of ignorance or credulity has ascribed to his character. Under the appellation of Merlin, this ancient bard has long acquired with the world a sort of proverbial celebrity for certain necromantic qualifications, which, it is most probable, were originally inferred from that poetical enthusiasm, by which he appears to have been actuated. And it may also be, that the circumstances of his life, marked, as it was, by a singular waywardness of fortune, contributed their aid to the popular misapprehension, in which his name has been involved. And, thus, a sort of spurious and visionary renown has supplanted that genuine reputation, to which Merddin is entitled as one of the most eminent bards during an age, illustrious in the poetical annals of Wales.

Merddin ab Morvryn, or Merddin Wylt, as he is generally called, to distinguish him from Merddin Emrys*, is reputed to have been the son of Madog Morvryn, who lived in North Britain during the sixth century: and, from the title of Caledonius, affixed to his name in some early records, it has been inferred, that he was a native of that part of the country, which bordered on the great forest of Celyddon, or Caledonia. But, wherever the precise spot of his birth may have been, it seems generally agreed, that it was in some part of the confines of Scotland†. The rank, which Merddin's family filled, does not particularly appear; but, if the authority of a Welsh poet of the fourteenth

* Merddin Emrys lived about a century earlier than Merddin Wylt: a notice of him occurs in the former volume, p. 124.

† Some accounts, but of no apparent authority, ascribe his birth, respectively, to Dimetia, or Dyfed, and to the neighbourhood of Conway, Caernarvonshire.

century be of any weight, the bard was of the tribe of Meirchion*, a Cumbrian chieftain of eminence, and great-grandfather of the celebrated Llywarch Hen. It is discoverable, too, from a part of his own writings, that he was in possession of a considerable patrimony, and that he also acted in the capacity of a military chieftain, both which circumstances will come, more properly, under consideration in the sequel. It is likewise recorded of him, that he was, in his youth, a disciple of Meigant, who was himself a poet, and to whom one of the few surviving productions of that age is ascribed. Subsequently to his connection with Meigant, the bard appears, agreeably with the custom of that period, to have been taken under the patronage of Gwenddolau ab Ceidio, a prince of Clydesdale†, who, in one instance, evinced his regard for his *protégé*, by presenting him with an orchard, which forms the subject of the principal poem, that has descended to us under the name of Merddin‡. And in those rude times such a gift may have possessed a value, which the refinements of the present age make it difficult to appreciate, and which may, therefore, account for the impassioned strains, in which the poet records his patron's bounty, without having recourse, as some have had, to a mystical interpretation of the occurrence§.

During the whole of this period, it may reasonably be presumed, that the life of Merddin was spent in his native country: and, accordingly, we find the first important event, related of him, to be his engagement in one of those contests, so frequent in North Britain during that disturbed period, and to which allusion has already been made in the memoirs of the contemporary

* The poet, here alluded to, is Gwilym Ddu, who, in his *Elegy on Trahaiarn*, has the following lines:—

“ Good was the fortune of the song of Gwion the Divine,

Good was Merddin with his descent from the Tribe of Meirchion.”

† The name of Gwenddolau occurs in a former page of this Number, in the “*Triads of the Isle of Britain*,” where he is recorded as one of the three “*bulls of conflict*.” The *Triads* also distinguish him, on another occasion, as the head of one of the three “*faithful tribes*,” as his followers continued fighting for six weeks after he was slain.

‡ Merddin, in his *Avallenau*, describes this orchard as containing 147 apple-trees “on the slope of a majestic hill, branching high and wide, and crowned with lovely foliage.”

§ Mr. Davies, in his “*Mythology and Rites of the Druids*,” undertakes to prove, that “these trees were purely allegorical, and imported the various secrets of Druidism.” How he has succeeded in this attempt may form the subject of some future inquiry.

bards, Aneurin and Llywarch Hen*. Merddin himself commemorates this circumstance in his *Avalleuau*, or Orchard, where he says,—

“ In the battle of Arderydd I wore the golden torques,”

a distinction, which proves, that he filled the rank of a chief upon that occasion. The battle of Arderydd, of which several notices have already appeared in the CAMBRO-BRITON†, was fought on the borders of Scotland, during the latter part of the sixth century, probably about the year 577. In this conflict, which the Triads describe as extremely sanguinary, Merddin's patron fought, on the side of the traitor Aeddan, against Rhydderch Hael, or Rhydderch the Generous, a prince of the Cumbrian Britons, and seems thus to have deserted the cause of his countrymen, to aid the increasing power of the Saxons, of whom Aeddan is recorded as a confederate‡. However, if such was the fact, Gwenddolau soon found the reward of his treachery; for he was numbered among the victims of this disastrous conflict, and with him fell also four of the brothers of Merddin, whose death the bard pathetically laments. Nor were these the only afflicting consequences he had to deplore, since it may be collected from his principal poem, that his nephew, the son of his sister Gwenddydd, who had probably espoused the cause of Rhydderch, was slain by the bard's own hand in this fatal encounter, as appears from the following passage,—

“ Worse hath befallen me without hope of deliverance,
The son of Gwenddydd is slain, my hand hath done it.”

And, to fill up the measure of the bard's sorrows, his patrimonial territory is described as having been also sacrificed to the triumph of Rhydderch§.

This complication of calamities seems to have operated, with an instantaneous and poignant severity, upon the ill-omened bard: he became at once inaccessible to all consolation, and, in a fit of mental distraction, flew from the habitations of men to

* See the former volume, pp. 91 and 287.

† See vol. i. p. 442., No. 13. p. 10., and No. 17. p. 218.

‡ For this reason Aeddan is described in the Triads as one of the three “Arant Traitors” of Britain.—See vol. i. p. 441. He is also commemorated as having achieved one of the three “exterminating slaughters,” in ravaging the territory of Rhydderch, above noticed.

§ Rhydderch is described in the Triads as chief of *Alclwyd*, supposed by some to be the present Dunbarton.

take his abode with the beasts of the forest. It was in the great wood of Caledonia that he is reported to have sought, in this extremity, the alleviation, or the indulgence, of his overwhelming distress: and the picture, which he has drawn of his sufferings, is a sufficient proof of their acuteness and their variety. It presents a strange mixture of frenzy, grief, and remorse, accompanied by such a spirit of poetical enthusiasm, as may well have afforded a pretext for imputing to him that supernatural inspiration, of which he has since had the credit. It must have been under the impression of the mingled feelings, above noticed, that he made the following exclamations in his *Avallenau*, the greatest part of which poem is of the same plaintive tenour:—

“ For myself, I am a wild horrible screamer;—
 I am pierced with anguish, and have no raiment to cover me.”
 “ Gwenddydd does not love me, she never greets me,
 I am detested by the chiefs of Rhydderch;
 I have ruined his son and his daughter*,
 Death relieves all, why does he not visit me?”

In addition to this internal evidence of the event, now under consideration, from the productions of Merddin himself, we have also the testimony of other writers, and of which that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, in a long Latin poem, written in the twelfth century, entitled the “ Life of Merddin,” is the most remarkable†. This poem, which is addressed to Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, commences with the following lines:—

“ Vatidici vatis rabiem, musamque jocosam
 Merlini cantare paro: tu corrige carmen,
 Gloria pontificum, calamos moderando Roberte.”

The poem then proceeds to detail the divisions, that had taken place among the Cumbrian chiefs, and more particularly the disastrous fight of Arderydd; and, after dwelling upon the losses sustained by Merddin on that occasion, his flight to the woods and his mode of life there are depicted in strong colours. He is described as making herbs, roots, and berries his only sustenance, and as having, in a word, exchanged the habits of a human be-

* The precise meaning of this allusion cannot be discovered, on which account no use has been made of it in this memoir.

† This poem, which has never appeared in print, may be found amongst the Cotton MSS. in the British Museum, “ Vespasian, E. 4.” p. 113. to p. 139.

ing for those of a savage. This part of the poem concludes with the following passage:

“ Fit sylvester homo, quasi sylvis deditus esset,
Inde per æstatem totam, nullique repertus,
Oblitusque sui, cognatorumque suorum,
Delituit sylvis, obductus more ferino.”

It was from the events of this period of his life, that the bard acquired the name of *Wyllt*, or Wild, an appellation, which may have contributed, with the circumstance previously noticed, to the romantic and ambiguous light, in which his character has been viewed.

It cannot be ascertained how long the bard continued an inhabitant of the Forest of Caledonia; but it must, in all probability, have been for a considerable period, as it is related of him, that he was frequently visited there by his sister Gwenddydd, and also, that the greatest portion of his poetical effusions were composed in that dreary retreat. The next important memorial of him is his removal to Wales, whither, it is most likely, the growing power of the Saxons had driven him in common with so many more of his countrymen. And, here, it cannot be a matter of surprise to learn, that he should have sought an acquaintance with the renowned Taliesin, at that time the most eminent of the Welsh bards. Accordingly we find, among the productions ascribed to that poet, a Dialogue between him and Merddin*, which, by whomsoever written, is to be regarded as an evidence of that intimacy, which a congeniality of talent and feeling must have rendered so natural. Geoffrey of Monmouth also, in the Latin poem already quoted, bears testimony to the fact, as in the following lines, in the first of which Merddin is supposed to address his sister Gwenddydd:—

“ O dilecta soror, Telyesinoque venire
Præcipe, namque loqui desidero plurima secum.
* * * * *
Venerat interea Merlinum visere vatem
Tunc Telyesinus, qui discere missus ab illo
Quid ventus nimbusve foret, nam mixtus uterque;
Tunc simul instabant, et nubila conficiebant.”

And the Triads, as if to offer an additional proof of the friendship of the two poets, associate them with Merddin Emrys as forming the three Christian bards of the Isle of Britain.

* Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 48.

From a concurrence of the most credible accounts it appears, that the remainder of Merddin's life, after his arrival in Wales, was spent there, and that he drew his last breath in the Isle of Enlli, or, as it is more commonly called, Bardsey. This island was, in that age, the general retreat of bards and religious devotees, of whom, at different times, about twenty thousand are traditionally reported to have been buried within it. There, too, it is affirmed upon good authority, were laid the remains of Merddin ab Morvryn, who, although a native of another country, may, both from his language and descent, be claimed by Cymry, as forming one of the brightest constellations in their poetical galaxy. He died about the conclusion of the sixth century, having previously, as is supposed, united the reputation of a saint with that of a bard.

The fame of Merddin, as a poet, has been, for the most part, misrepresented even by those, who have professed to understand his productions: by some it has been exaggerated, and by others estimated much below its actual merit. There are six pieces preserved, under his name, in the Welsh Archaiology, of which the following are the titles in English:—Ode to Yscolan—Merddin's Oracles from his Grave—Invocation to Pigs—Dialogue between Merddin and his Sister—The Apple-Trees or Orchard—and The Impulses*. Of these one or two, from the inferiority of their poetical merit and other circumstances, do not appear to be justly ascribable to Merddin; but there seems no real ground for rejecting, as Mr. Turner has done, all but the *Avallenau*, or Orchard. The *Hoianau*, or Invocation to Pigs, and the Ode to Yscolan have an equal claim to be considered as genuine; and it is not improbable, that the Dialogue between Taliesin and Merddin, above noticed, and published in the Archaiology among the works of the former poet, belongs in reality to the latter. Most of the poems, here particularized, abound, as may be expected from the early age in which they were composed, in unintelligible and mystical allusions, the latter borrowed, perhaps, in a great degree from the Druidical institution. Yet there are, on the other hand, many historical notices, both with respect to the age, in which the poet lived, and to the times immediately preceding; and some of which are narrated with an air of prophetic enthusiasm, not uncommon to the poets of other countries, but which, in Merddin's case, assisted to produce the popular

* These poems are published in the first volume of the Archaiology, p. 132. to p. 154. and at p. 527.

delusion respecting him, which has been already adverted to. However, there was no more reason for this than there is for ascribing the same qualities to Horace, because he spoke prophetically of the destruction of Troy in his Ode, commencing—

“Pastor cūm traheret per freta navibus.”

In the same spirit Merddin, alluding to the Battle of Camlan, fought, perhaps, just before, says in his *Avallenau*,—

“My prophetic song shall announce the return
Of Medrawd and Arthur, monarch of the warlike host;
Again shall they rush to the battle of Camlan;
Two days shall the battle last,
And seven only shall escape from the slaughter.”

Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 153.

As examples of the poetical beauty of some of Merddin's productions, the following passages, also from the *Avallenau*, may be selected even under all the disadvantage of a literal English version:—

“Sweet apple-tree, of vigorous growth and of verdant foliage,
Spreading are thy branches, lovely is thy form;
Ere the desolations of murderous war caused me to rage with
grief,
How beautiful was the sight of thy mantle of lively green!
Yet shall my prophetic strains announce the day,
When my wrongs shall be avenged by a mighty legion,
The valiant armies of Pengwern*, fierce in conflict, glowing
with the animation of mead.”

Ib. vol. i. p. 151.

The following is the concluding stanza of the same poem, which is thought to have contained, originally, as many stanzas as there were trees in Merddin's Orchard, the number of which is mentioned in a preceding note.

“Sweet apple-tree, loaded with the most delicious fruit,
Growing in the solitary wilds of the woods of Celyddon,
All seek thee for the sake of thy produce, but in vain;
When Cadwaladr comes, in league with the lord of Rheon,
And Cynan† comes, to oppose the career of the Saxons,

* The ancient name for Shrewsbury, which was, in the time of Merddin, the seat of the Princes of Powys.—See CAMBRO-BRITON, vol. i. p. 290.

† We have no other notice of any chieftain of the name of Cadwaladr, as contemporary with Merddin; but the name of Cynan occurs, in the “Chronicle of the Kings,” as king of Britain about 544, at which time Merddin was living.

Then shall the Cymry be again victorious, led by their noble
and majestic chieftain,
Then shall every one repossess his own,
Then shall the sounder of the horn of gladness proclaim the song
of peace, and halcyon days."

Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 153.

Ere this article is brought to a close it may not be uninteresting to collect a few of the notices, that occur of Merddin in the early bards and other writers, and which are of particular value in proving the degree of reputation he enjoyed during times, when the opportunities of estimating it must have been more favourable than at present, whether from the more abundant remains of his works, or from such other obvious causes, as must have rendered them less obscure than they have since become.

The Latin poem of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was consecrated Bishop of Llandav in 1152, has been already cited: and it may here be observed generally, that it dwells, in many instances, on the merit of Merddin as among the most celebrated poets of his day.

To him succeeds, in chronological order, Giraldus Cambrensis, a learned writer in Latin, who lived from 1145 to 1215, and who, in one of his works has the following passage:—"The fame of Merddin, surnamed Caledonius or Sylvester, has hitherto been very distinguished. The memory of his prophecies has been retained among the British bards, whom they call poets, verbally by many, and in writing by a few."

Davydd Benfras, a bard, who flourished during the same period as Giraldus, thus commences his sublime Ode to Llywelyn*:

"Creator of that glorious light,
Which sheds around its vivid rays,
And the pale moon, which rules the night,
O, deign to animate my lays!
O, may my verse like Merddin's flow,
And with poetic visions glow!"

Iorwerth Vychan, who wrote about the close of the thirteenth century, has the following passage:—

"More precious, with the splendid bards, every long day,
Than when Merddin, of profound learning, sang of Gwen-
ddydd."

* A translation of this Ode may be seen in the former volume, p. 470.

Rhisierdyn, a poet contemporary with the last, evinces the respect, in which he held the productions of Merddin, by the following line:—

“I will preserve, in honoured authority, the memorials of Merddin.”

And, lastly, Sevnyn, a bard of the succeeding century, thus commemorates the reputation, in which the Caledonian poet was held in his time.

“May I possess the faculty of amusing speech,

Copious as the highly gifted effusions of Merddin’s imagination.”

It may be fairly presumed from these quotations, and which, if space permitted, might be considerably augmented, that the works of Merddin were formerly much esteemed for their poetical merit, without reference to that mystical character, which has since been imputed to them, in common with the productions of other ancient bards. That many of these venerable remains contain allusions to the obsolete and obscure mysteries of the Druids it would be vain to deny; but it belongs to the writer, who entertains a due respect for our ancient literature, to rescue it from those imputations, which would confound its varied merits in one mass of unintelligible mysticism, and which would have the still more injurious effect of erecting the ideal temple of fable upon the ruins of the fair fabric of history*. And, with a view to this, it must not be forgotten, that Merddin, like his bardic contemporaries, lays claim to the character of an historian as well as to that of a poet.

* * *

ETYMOLOGY.

THE WORD “ANT” AND ITS SYNONYMES.

To the EDITOR of the CAMBRO-BRITON.

IN my wandering, which you, Sir, were so indulgent as to ad-

* It was intended to close this imperfect notice of Merddin with an examination of the opinions here alluded to, and which are entitled to respect from the degree of learning and ability, with which they have been enforced. However, want of room has made it necessary to postpone this design until some future occasion, when, perhaps, it may be deemed advisable to enter into a regular investigation of the mystical and mythological character, ascribed to our ancient poems.